

THE “FREAK” CARIBOU
CHAD ARMENT

I recently came across mention in a book on Oklahoma strangeness (PJ Lassek's *Oklahoma Curiosities*, Guilford, CT: Globe Pequot Press, 2008) the following mention of the Midgley Museum of Enid, Oklahoma: “The Midgleys were expert hunters and skilled marksmen, and there is a trophy room, displaying many of their kills ranging from buffalo to a ‘freak caribou,’ which is a cross between a cow and caribou.” Now, hybridization between cattle species is known, as well as between deer species, but a hybrid caribou-cow just didn’t seem likely. I contacted the museum, asking for further details on the specimen.

Museum volunteer Mike Smith kindly replied to my query. He found the specimen in question and provided photographs. The caribou is simply a “caribou cow,” or female caribou. Apparently this was misinterpreted by Lassek as a caribou-cow cross. The mistake was probably influenced by the specimen’s atrophied antlers, though these antlers are within the species’ natural range of variation. So, don’t believe everything you read in those popular state-by-state books on strange phenomena. Sometimes a caribou is just a caribou.

(Thanks to Mike Smith for permission to reproduce the accompanying photographs.)



